In 1953, a bilateral agreement on immigration was established between Canada and Portugal. This was the first time that a door opened for Portuguese people to immigrate to Canada, mostly destined for the agricultural sector. A trickle came in 1953. In 1954, the first 1000 immigrants, generally married men, arrived in Canada. There were 700 agricultural workers and 250 skilled tradesmen. They came from the Azores Islands. In 1955, 900 farm workers plus 50 tradesmen came to Canada from mainland Portugal, the writer’s father among them aboard the *Arosa Star*, and that heritage prompted an interview with Emilia Miranda Matias on May 23, 2016 to record memories of her immigration experience and settlement in Naramata, BC. Emilia is the writer’s mother-in-law.

Emilia’s husband, José Machado Matias, arrived in Canada on April 12, 1957. He was among that year’s quota of about 1000 Portuguese immigrants to Canada. He landed in Montreal then travelled by train to Penticton, BC, along with several other men. They were destined to work in the orchards of the Okanagan Valley. On arrival, the men
were housed in a hotel in Penticton and, over the following days, orchardists would come and look them over and select one to work for them. José Matias later would say that they felt like cattle in a stock yard waiting to be bought. He was hired by orchardist Carroll Aikens of Naramata for whom he worked for about 2 years.

By 1957, the migrants no longer travelled by ship. Men from various islands congregated in São Miguel and took a boat to Santa Maria where the international airport in the Azores was located.

In September of that year, Emilia made that same trip with their two daughters: Maria Emilia, aged 4 and Rosa, aged 14 months. The couple had been married on the island of Terceira where they were both born and raised. ‘Joe’ was the oldest son of 5 children and began working when he was still just a boy on account of his father having died at an early age. His was a great responsibility as the other children were too young to carry any of the load. Emilia was also one of five children. Living in an economically depressed area, it was of great significance when an opportunity came for the man of the house to go abroad to work.

Their move to Canada was almost sabotaged. The process in Portugal included a medical inspection on the island of Terceira by a Portuguese doctor and a secondary inspection on the island of São Miguel by a Canadian doctor. When the family went there for their medical, Emilia had developed a rash, possibly due to her pregnancy, and the family was rejected. A later inspection went well and the family was accepted. The process for immigration was so rigorous that a satirical song made the rounds citing that “Canada must be better than heaven because, in heaven, you are accepted even with flaws but not so in Canada.”

In the months before the family arrived in Naramata, José had fixed up and furnished the cabin on the Aikens orchard that would be their family home. Today, part of the property is Van Westen vineyard while another part, including the main house, was later bought by Manuel Araujo, another Portuguese immigrant. The cabin, however, was not insulated and when winter came it was very cold inside. Emilia recalls that Mr. Wimester, whom she worked for as a housekeeper, seeing the little girls suffering from cold, went to the shack to look at their living conditions. He was appalled to see so much frost on the inside of the walls and the meagre clothing and bedding that the family had. [This incident may have occurred the
second winter, because Mrs. Matias says that the conversation was through her daughter, Maria Emilia] Mr. Wimester said that he was going to report this to Immigration but Emilia persuaded him not to do so as they had nowhere else to live. Instead, he donated several blankets to the family.

When Mr. Aikens sold the orchard, José went to work for Don Salting, where they also lived in a cabin. Times were sometimes hard for the family. One day Mrs. Salting told Maria that it was time for her to go home for supper. In all innocence, the little girl said that there was no food at their house. Alarmed, Mrs. Salting went to the cabin and asked to look inside. She was startled to see that, indeed, there was no food in the house. Mrs. Matias admits that they occasionally went hungry in the early years. Still, a car was a necessity for trips to town to go to church and get groceries.

After a while, José went to work for Mr. Ward (on Boothe Rd) until that man too sold his orchard. During their stay at this location, another daughter, Liz, was born. After the sale of that property, the family moved into the village, where they lived on the SE corner of Robinson and Bartlett in a cabin that was both modest and rat-infested. This was followed by a period in a cabin on the 800 block of Ellis Ave. [Coincidentally, at this writing, Rosa Matias and the author are living on the same property] At this point, José was hired by Fred Ritchie and the family found significantly better accommodation on the Ritchie property where they lived for some time. While there, their son, Joe, was born.

All four of the children attended Naramata Elementary and then went to High School in Penticton, riding there on the school bus. To catch the bus meant making their way from their house at the intersection of Gulch and Clarke Lane each morning. This could be a precarious trek during winter when it was slippery. In fact, more than one car ended up in their yard after failing to stop at the bottom of Clarke. But the family fortunes improved and life was rich with church events and the Portuguese community. Those family friends, though, could be widely scattered. Oftentimes, events were held in Oliver...
or Osoyoos, a significant trip for the family. But the family only recalls going on two long road trips. Once to Calgary to visit friends and another to Vancouver. On that trip, the driver threw his cigarette butt out of the window only to have it sucked back in and land on the lap of the man sitting behind him. The car was so full of passengers that he had a hard time getting rid of the dangerous cargo, much to everyone’s amusement.

If the prior years were difficult for the family, then 1970 was a disaster. At age 43, José suffered a heart attack and was hospitalized. The years of hard labour had piled upon the difficult life that the man had endured while growing up. Fred Ritchie had no provision for paying his disabled worker and directed the family to the welfare office. They were denied benefits claiming that the daughter, Maria, who was approaching 18 years old could quit school to go work to support the family. Mr. Ritchie pressed the welfare office to reconsider and they relented, providing the family with food support. Meantime, two Naramata families made food contributions to the family and their names are still lauded by the family to this day. The Hoffmans and the Hancocks both left provisions outside the door unannounced, Christmas Hampers, but the family were well aware who the food was from. Between welfare and neighbourly good-will, the family survived until José was back on his feet. Dr. Melton, the family physician, got him a job at Penticton Regional Hospital as a janitor and the family’s fortunes improved substantially after that. Emilia would ultimately get full-time work at the hospital too. Prior to that, she had worked sporadically as a housekeeper at the Aikens’ house (the stone house) and at the packing house.

José could be labeled a shy, even timid, man, says Emilia. While other Portuguese men made a good life for themselves, he was always hesitant to start any kind of venture although he had opportunities. His horizons obscured all possibilities except providing good honest work for a wage and that simplicity also meant that he occasionally was taken advantage of. But his life was not an unhappy one. He would often say that no matter how bad things were in the early years in Canada, it was still infinitely better than the life he had known in Portugal. Certainly, he was no stranger to hunger and deprivation. Probably as a result of the poverty he experienced in his youth, he never suffered the nostalgia that drove other immigrants to return to Portugal or, at least, pay a visit. Joe never went back for a visit. His family life in Canada, on the other hand, was a cheerful one and his dedication to the Catholic Church was another source of great satisfaction, as it still is for Emilia who, at 82, attends church daily and has become a legendary cinnamon bun baker for church events.

In 1978, the family was evicted from the Ritchie property to make room for a new employee. That’s when Joe and Emilia bought their very first home at 97 Manor Park in Penticton. José lived there until his death on December 3, 2011. Emilia still lives in the home at this writing and is blessed by the frequent presence of her four children, six surviving grandchildren and five great-grandchildren. She is thoroughly content with her family and is deeply loved by them.

I asked Emilia to recall some of the other Portuguese families from the ‘old days’ in Naramata. She remem-
bers many names, although some of the people returned to the motherland and others migrated to Oliver, Osoyoos or elsewhere.

Manuel Dores and his wife Maria Clara Dores. This couple were among the first Portuguese to arrive in Naramata. Manuel worked on the Rayner orchard and Maria Clara was employed at the Naramata packing house.

Manuel Pereira and Ilda Pereira were also among the first Portuguese in Naramata. They had a son named Daniel.

Antonio Matias was José’s brother. He and his wife, Maria, (both deceased) had an orchard on Hayman Rd. and had two children: Victor (died 2016) and Susan (lives in Pt. Coquitlam).

Agostinho Tavares came to Naramata in the same group as José Matias. He and his wife had two children: Joe Tavares and Maria Tavares who both live in Penticton at this writing.

João and Aliçe Borba. They had daughters named Susan and Zélia. At this writing, ‘John’ is in Haven Hill Retirement Home. The family recalls Aliçe being periodically called to donate blood as she was either a ‘universal donor’ or perhaps had a rare type. She is less admired for having a low opinion of the Matias girls who, she would tell people, were tramps and their behaviour resulted in their father having a heart attack.

Manuel Borba was ‘John’ Borba’s brother. His wife was Conçeição Borba. They had two sons: Michael (died) and Duarte who lives in Summerland at this writing.

Menduca and Celeste Melo were other Portuguese immigrants in Naramata. Celeste is still living at this writing.

José Miranda was Emilia Matias’ brother. He lived in Naramata for some years and later moved to Calgary. He died in Victoria in 1982.

Francisco and Fatima Valente had a son, Frank (who lives in Kelowna) and two daughters. Mr. Valente worked for Mr. Sorder.

Manuel and Teresa Trovão. Their children are José, Richard and Angela. Manuel died but the rest of the family remains in Naramata and Penticton.

Antonio Trovão is Manuel’s brother. At this writing he still has a vineyard in Naramata and his son, ‘Tony’ is the Fire Chief there.

Another of Manuel’s brothers who lived in Naramata is José Trovão. He lived on N. Naramata Rd but moved to Osoyoos where he bought an orchard.

Manuel Farinha. The Farinha family moved to Osoyoos and bought 20 acres. Their two children now run a winery on the property. The Adega winery.

Alfredo Farinha (Manuel Farinha’s brother)

Oliveira
Manuel and Ester García lived in Naramata as well. Their children are John (d.) Frank and his wife Grace and another son named Joe. I am most grateful to Mrs. Matias for her candor in speaking about her immigrant experience. Coming from a culture that placed little value on education (specially for girls) and initially unable to speak English, she nevertheless did a superb job of raising her family and making a contribution to the community. She learned the language, got a driver’s license, worked in the Naramata packing house and, later, joined the housekeeping staff at Penticton Hospital.

All her children grew into good and productive citizens, exactly what the 1953 Canada-Portugal agreement on immigration had hoped to accomplish.

Emilia poses with a modern appliance, the wringer-washer. Notice the stove and open oven of her outdoor kitchen displaying her domestic endeavours. This was the cabin on the Aikens orchard. 1957

Maria Emilia and Rosa c. 1959 at Ward’s orchard on Boothe Rd.
MATIAS, José Machado and Emilia Miranda

Maria Emilia and Rosa hold hands with Frankie Valente at Manitou Park. c. 1958

Maria Emilia’s First Communion at St Anne’s Parish. c. 1961

Rosa at an early age sitting in an orchard. c. 1958
Clockwise from top left: José Matias fertilizing trees on Ritchie’s orchard. Emilia holding daughters when living at Aikens orchard. Maria Emilia, Rosa and Liz with family dogs at Ritchie cabin on Gulch Rd. Church day at St. Anne Parish on Main St. in Penticton c. 1964.
Above: José with Manuel García at Manitou Park. The two knew each other in Terceira before coming to Canada. In Portugal, Manuel repaired sewing machines for a living.

Left: Tony Matias, Rosa, Emilia holding Liz, Maria Emilia, Teresa Trovão and Manuel Trovão.

Right: The Matias family with a gathering of friends. L to R are: Maria and Manuel Dores, José and Emilia Matias, Fatima and Francisco Valente and Menduca Melo. The man sitting was João (last name forgotten) with Maria Emília Matias, Frankie Valente and Rosa Matias. c. 1958
L to R: Manuel Trovão, his wife Teresa (nee Matias), Maria Emilia, Mrs. Matias and Tony Matias.

Rosa, Emilia (with Liz in arms) and Maria Emilia when they lived on the Ward property on Boothe Rd. c. 1961.

Liz, Rosa, Emilia and Maria when they lived on the Ritchie property on Gulch Rd.
Clockwise starting above: All four of the children together c. 1969 at one sitting. Photo taken when they lived at the Ritchie property. Emilia and José enjoying a summer day at Manitou Park. Emilia at 16 years old. Photo was taken in Portugal. Below: Rosa in her Brownie uniform poses in front of the family car. Photo was taken on Gulch Rd c. 1967.
Further Reading/Sources


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